



ALL PHOTOS CAROL M. HIGHSMITH FOR THE NPS MUSEUM MANAGEMENT PROGRAM EXCEPT AS NOTED. LEFT EISE 667

at home with

# IKE *and* MAMIE

**A LIFE ON VIEW AT THE PRESIDENT'S PENNSYLVANIA FARM** BY MEGHAN HOGAN

Former First Lady Mamie Eisenhower once joked that she had “lived in everything but an igloo,” for in her 53 years of marriage to Dwight D. Eisenhower, they lived in 37 different places. But she only called one of them, a rural Pennsylvania farmhouse, home.

Left: A ceramic jug, which sits on the porch of the ex-president's farmhouse, is just one of many representational figures that testify to his iconic status, including plastic statuettes of him and Mamie offered as prizes in cereal boxes.

**DUBBED THE “TEMPORARY WHITE HOUSE” DURING IKE’S STAY WHILE RECOVERING** from his first heart attack in 1955, the farm—now called the Eisenhower National Historic Site—served as a retreat during his presidency. It did not become the Eisenhower’s permanent address until 1961 when the couple left Washington. Retirement didn’t slow Ike down—he kept up his military work ethic even in the pursuit of relaxation. He once joked to Walter Cronkite that his wife thought retirement was “just a word in the dictionary,” because for the ex-president it was the truth. Nowhere better can Ike admirers see this than when visiting the two-story structure, and with a new virtual exhibit now on the National Park Service Museum Management website, the contents of the house, on the outskirts of Gettysburg Battlefield, can be examined close up.

The web exhibit is not only a snapshot of the couple’s golden years, but also boasts many artifacts of Eisenhower’s army days, and later, his time as the nation’s 34th president.

Born into a poor family in 1890, Ike was the third of seven boys raised in Abilene, Kansas, on what one biography calls “the wrong side of the tracks.” While bright, paying for college was a struggle and he did not seem to have a particularly promising future until he got an appointment to West Point from Kansas senator Joseph Little Bristow. Ike was more interested in football than studying, but a knee injury ended his sports career, so he turned his attentions to the classroom, graduating as a second lieutenant in 1915. A year later he married 19-year-old Mamie Geneva Doud, their engagement sealed with a miniature of his West Point ring. Ike’s impressive climb up the military ranks had begun, culminating in 1944 with his promotion to five-star general, the same year he brilliantly led the invasion of Normandy.

Eisenhower’s stature as a war hero practically jumps off the computer screen, with item after item recalling his achievements. They include his silver and brass General of the Army insignia, his well-used Ronson lighter (he smoked four packs a day while planning the

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invasion), a plethora of troop patches and badges, and a swastika pennant confiscated by GIs as the Allies made their way into Germany.

**THE VIRTUAL TOUR ALSO FEATURES HIS CAMPAIGN MEMORABILIA, MUCH OF IT** adorned with a catch phrase that captures the era. The “I Like Ike” slogan—which took many forms, from buttons to bumper stickers—testified to Eisenhower’s extraordinary popularity. He was the second Republican to serve two terms, getting more votes in his second election than his first. Hallmark did Christmas cards of the couple, printed exclusively for friends and family. After the two moved into their Pennsylvania retreat, Americans showered them with housewarming gifts for the new home. “Ike had a checklist for what to do with the gifts,” says Carol Hegeman, the site’s supervisory historian. “There was even a box on it labeled ‘Ask Mamie.’”

This was often the sensible choice, because she was in charge of decorating, although interior designer Elizabeth Draper oversaw the work. As an army wife, Mamie had lived everywhere, even in the jungles of Panama, placing possessions in storage as she went. “I feel like a football—kicked from place to place,” she once said, so a house of her own meant a lot. Remembering how much the two of them

*Above: Likenesses of Ike in his U.S. Army uniforms. Right: A determined face stares back from a poster encouraging Americans to buy war bonds.*



# BACK 'EM UP





*THE “I LIKE IKE” SLOGAN—WHICH TOOK MANY*

LEFT TO RIGHT EISE 2584, EISE 15832, EISE 11213/HALLMARK COMPANY, EISE 8162



enjoyed Gettysburg, where they lived when Ike commanded nearby Camp Colt during World War I—they bought an eventual retirement home there while residing in New York City, where the ex-general was president of Columbia University before his election. Mamie fell in love with the 189-acre farm, declaring that she “must have this place.” The two-story brick house, dating to the 1750s, was purchased for \$44,000. No expense was spared in the renovation. New wings were added as the first lady asked for more and more changes, such as lowering the already installed bedroom windows so she could gaze out at the fields from her bed. An exasperated Ike, who refused to have the barn moved or the kitchen expanded, eventually gave in to her other requests.

Republic of Korea, and a painting of Prague from its citizens in gratitude for his actions in World War II. But the Eisenhowers were very down-to-earth and the house never felt like a museum. “A lot of people are surprised at how modest it is,” Hegeman says. Ike and Mamie loved hanging out in the enclosed back porch, where they watched “I Love Lucy” and “Gunsmoke.” Mamie so enjoyed soap operas that she had Secret Service agents watch when she couldn’t, then recount the story.

The setting saw many esteemed visitors from Churchill to De Gaulle. “Eisenhower liked to get them away from the White House formality so that he could get to know them one on one,” Hegeman says.

The porch doubled as Ike’s painting studio, where an easel holds a reproduction of his last, unfinished work. “I’ve burned more portraits than anything else,” he once said of his paintings, but several were made into prints for Christmas gifts while he was president. He got out the easel twice a week, “come hell or high water,” says Karal Ann Marling, author of *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s*, once painting seven pictures in ten days. “They’re no fun when they’re finished,” he said.

**FAMOUS FOR HIS AFTERNOONS GOLFING WHILE PRESIDENT, IKE HAD A PUTTING green installed by the Professional Golfers Association, where he wielded a Grip-rite putter engraved with his own name. He also dis-**



## FORMS, FROM BUTTONS TO BUMPER STICKERS—TESTIFIED TO

“For God’s sake, get her what she wants and send me the bill,” he told the construction engineer. The \$215,000 renovation transformed the house into a fifteen-room, nine-bath “modified Georgian,” as its architect Milton Osborne called it. Only 80 miles from Washington, yet surrounded by scenic serenity, “Mamie’s Dream House” was perfect for both of them. Gifted to the National Park Service in 1967, it was restored to its 1960s appearance after Mamie’s death in 1979. “Ninety-nine percent of the furnishings are original,” Hegeman says. The same crops still grow in the fields.

**A GUESTBOOK IN THE ENTRANCE HALL IS FILLED WITH THE SIGNATURE AND date of visitors received—with the exception of Nikita Khrushchev—even the four grandchildren who lived on a corner of the property. The living room boasts Mamie’s piano, a silk rug from the Shah of Iran, a black lacquer coffee table inlaid with mother-of-pearl from the**

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*Far left: Ike’s well-worn lighter, which fired up four packs of cigarettes a day during the planning for the Normandy invasion. Near left: “I Like Ike” in Spanish. Above left: Ike and Mamie, icons of their time; Hallmark got into the act with a 1955 Christmas card of the couple in their Crosley Runabout, tree and presents in tow, sent out exclusively to family and friends. Above right: Golf ball. Ike, known for afternoons on the links during his presidency, installed a putting green on the farm.*

played skill as a chef, with stews and Pennsylvania Dutch breakfasts. The cream-colored kitchen is a 1950s slice of life, with its Crosley refrigerator, metal cabinets, linoleum countertops, Veg-O-Matic food processor, and rocket-shaped Sunbeam mixer. He wasn't the main cook—that job went to Delores Moaney, who lived in the house with husband Sergeant John Moaney, his former valet in the army, who did the same job here. “The Eisenhowers were very busy people,” Hegeman points out when asked if Mamie ever did the laundry. The couple wholeheartedly embraced the new technology. Almost every room sports a telephone, in a multitude of hues including custom gold.

Mamie's love of pink lends the house much of its charm. When traveling, she carried a stick daubed with her preferred shade to match up to potential purchases. It started a nationwide craze and soon the

White House was dubbed the “Pink Palace.” Here, moss green bedroom walls set off a pink bedspread, curtains, and chairs. In the bathroom, tiles, toilet, sink, and towels all carry the hue. Not everything was pink, however. Mamie's enchanting hat collection, much of it Sally Victor-designed, was in a mix of colors, styles, and fabrics—everything from black velvet to pheasant feathers. But she would often have one of them perched on a pink hat stand that bears the letter E.

**A FASHION SHOW WAS A SUREFIRE WAY TO GET HER INTERESTED IN A fundraiser.** Though the spoiled daughter of a millionaire, she wasn't one to spend a lot, given Ike's meager salary in the early days of his career. They often had to “squeeze a dollar until the eagle screamed,” she joked. She favored the clearance racks at “J.C. Penné,” as she called it with a faux French accent, and was not embarrassed to admit it. “We had a hard time convincing her that she couldn't wear two-year-old dresses,” her favorite designer, Mollie Parnis, once said of Mamie's attempts to dress more like a first lady. Still, she made the list of “Twelve Best Dressed Women” every year Ike was in office. Yet she held on to her signature bangs even when they



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*Above left: Signature bangs visible in a 1948 portrait by Thomas Stevens. Above right: Mamie sparked the nationwide craze for pink, shown here in her hair dryer. Right: Pocket mirror in another favored hue, gold, engraved with Mamie Dowd Eisenhower's initials.*

went out of style. *Life* magazine retouched photos of her to prove that without them, she could be “the best looking First Lady.”

Like Mamie, Ike had his separate areas of the house, devoid of pink. His own bath is tiled in mint green; next door is a private room where he retired for afternoon naps after his heart troubles began. But a nap was never his preferred choice of activity. Always one to keep busy, he often had various projects underway, including the writing of his memoirs. He had an office at both Gettysburg College and at home, the latter featuring a reproduction of George Washington's desk made of old pine boards from the White House, discarded during a renovation in the late 1940s. But his true pride and joy was probably the farm itself. Growing up in Kansas, Eisenhower saw firsthand the challenges of trying to grow crops in depleted soil and was always keen on learning how to improve it. The

FAR LEFT EISE 415, NEAR LEFT EISE 5701, RIGHT EISE 11331







LEFT EISE 14329, NEAR RIGHT EISE 9197, FAR RIGHT EISE 11208/HALLMARK COMPANY

area's poor soil provided the perfect lab for conservation experiments. "I shall leave the place better than I found it," Eisenhower said of his land. He soon had area agricultural agents and members of the U.S. Soil Conservation Service poring over his fields with instruments such as core samplers, sending off scooped-out dirt in paper bags for analysis. Fertilization and location plans were developed for each crop, with one of the plans in the web exhibit.

**EISENHOWER ALSO TRIED HIS HAND AT CATTLE BREEDING, IN 1954 LAUNCHING** a full-blown cattle enterprise with friends who purchased the neighboring 306 acres. The operation had around 60-70 Aberdeen Angus purebreds, which competed in the top show circuits like the International Livestock Show. Eisenhower never wanted his cattle to get special treatment—he entered them under his partners' names, "Byars and Allen"—though his stock often earned awards.

"Fitting" the cattle for a show was a challenge. Farmhands spent hours washing, combing, and trimming the pampered animals. The task was time-consuming, so to make things easier on show days, Bob Hartley, the farm's herdsman, acquired the latest in labor-saving technology—an electric Dairy-Vac grooming machine. Hair gloss, brushes, combs, and leather halters were all a necessity to show off the cattle to their best. These items, and more, are all part of the web exhibit.

Inspecting the crops and livestock was one of the first things that Eisenhower did when arriving from Washington. Because of his immense pride in the farm, it was often the first thing that visiting dignitaries did too. "Eisenhower would stuff them in the golf cart and subject them to a two hour tour," says John Joyce, an interpreter at the site. "He felt the relaxing atmosphere was more conducive than Camp David," the official pres-



idential retreat only 18 miles away. Ike eventually received an "Honorary Master Farmer" award from the Pennsylvania State Farmer's Association, but after a second heart attack in 1966, he decided to downsize the business. He closed it completely in 1969, the year he died after a lengthy stay at Walter Reed General Hospital. Looking out at the green fields surrounding the farm, it's not hard to imagine that he wished he could have spent those last months here. With Ike gone, Mamie often piled his side of the bed with books and candy so that she felt less lonely.

**NOW, ALMOST 40 YEARS LATER, THE APPEARANCE OF A NEW BIOGRAPHY ON THE** bestseller lists attests to the rekindled interest in the Eisenhowers. Ike devotees can research much of his life at the presidential library in his hometown of Abilene, Kansas, and of course, dozens of Eisenhower-related websites are already scattered across the Internet. But exploring online the house where he ate, slept, worked, and played brings both him and Mamie back to life in a way that no book ever will.

Access the online exhibit through the National Park Service Museum Management Program website at [www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/eise/index.html](http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/eise/index.html) or the park's home page at [www.nps.gov/eise](http://www.nps.gov/eise). In addition to the artifact photos, viewers can see a timeline of Eisenhower's achievements, check out the farmhouse floor plan, look at slide shows of family photos, and even hear Mamie herself in a 1973 interview.

*Left: Hat and stand in Mamie's favored hues. Below left: One of the many multicolored telephones. Below right: A Hallmark Christmas illustration of Mamie with hair of holly and her name spelled out in signature bangs.*

## MAMIE'S LOVE OF PINK LENDS THE HOUSE MUCH OF ITS CHARM.

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